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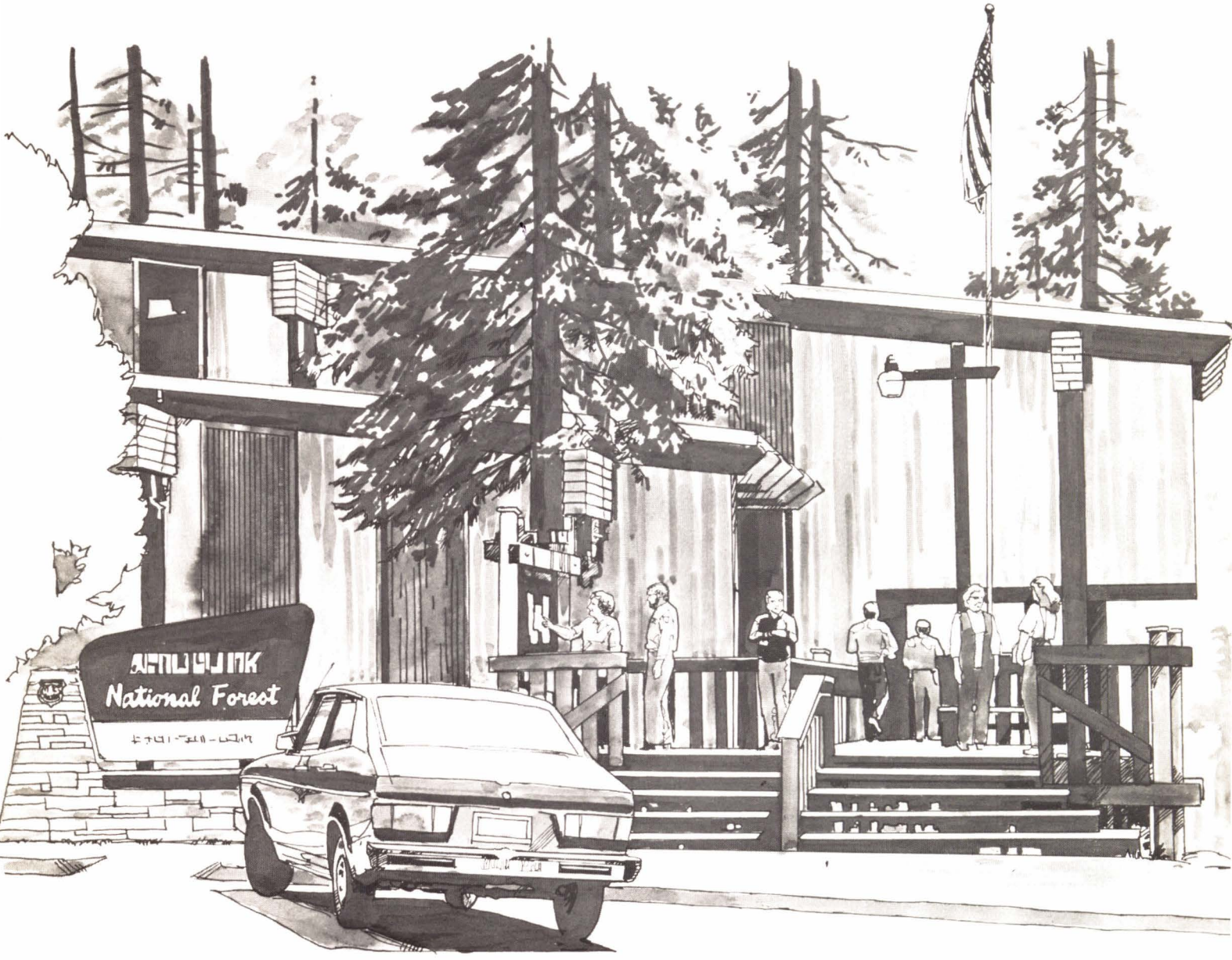
United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Guide to Forest Service Office Design, Identification, And Location



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Guide to Forest Service Office Design, Identification, And Location

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About this guide

This guide is part of an effort to help Forest Service personnel to become better HOSTS to an increasing number of people using the National Forests. The guide demonstrates why and how our image of public service is conveyed through the individual Forest Service office, and discusses how public service can be improved by the application of good design and planning.

In many cases we occupy office facilities or encounter budgetary and other constraints that prevent the incorporation of all the ideas outlined in this publication. The art work contained here-in is conceptual in nature. However, when planning for a new facility or the rehabilitation of an existing office the concepts contained in this guide should be considered. These suggestions will help project the image of an efficient, considerate, and professional land management organization.

The guide discusses the basic design schemes for Forest Service offices, and illustrates how the scheme can serve as a valuable framework for a variety of office design situations. General guidelines for the location of Forest Service leased facilities are also discussed. Finally, the guide is a useful tool to help you evaluate your present office, and provides a step-by-step process to formulate and implement an effective plan to improve your office.

Guide To Forest Service Office Design, Identification, And Location

The HOST Program

The HOST Program was initiated to help Forest Service personnel become more aware of their responsibility to serve the increasing number of National Forest users that visit us each year. The program has evolved out of a long tradition of public service. Many different groups have benefited from the National Forest resources—loggers, firewood gatherers, hikers, campers, and many others. The HOST Program is examining ways that the Forest Service can enhance its ability to serve the public in many aspects. Some of these include better person-to-person contact, more responsive telephone style, publications improvement, and increased educational resources. Each of these indicates a manner in which you, as a Forest Service representative, communicate to the public. Each contributes to how the public sees the Forest Service. When you speak with a visitor in your office, or relate information over the telephone, *you* are the Forest Service. The purpose of any public service that you provide should be to leave the user with the feeling that you care about their National Forest experience, and that your response will be of some value to them. This is not easy and takes practice, but is the key to the success of the HOST Program.

The HOST Program and the Forest Service office

When you answer a caller's inquiry, or give directions to a camper's group, you are communicating. In many ways, the HOST Program is about communicating. Yet, as simple as this sounds when we talk of telephone or letter contact, there are other indirect ways in which communication happens. These can tell as much about our public service concern as our voice can.

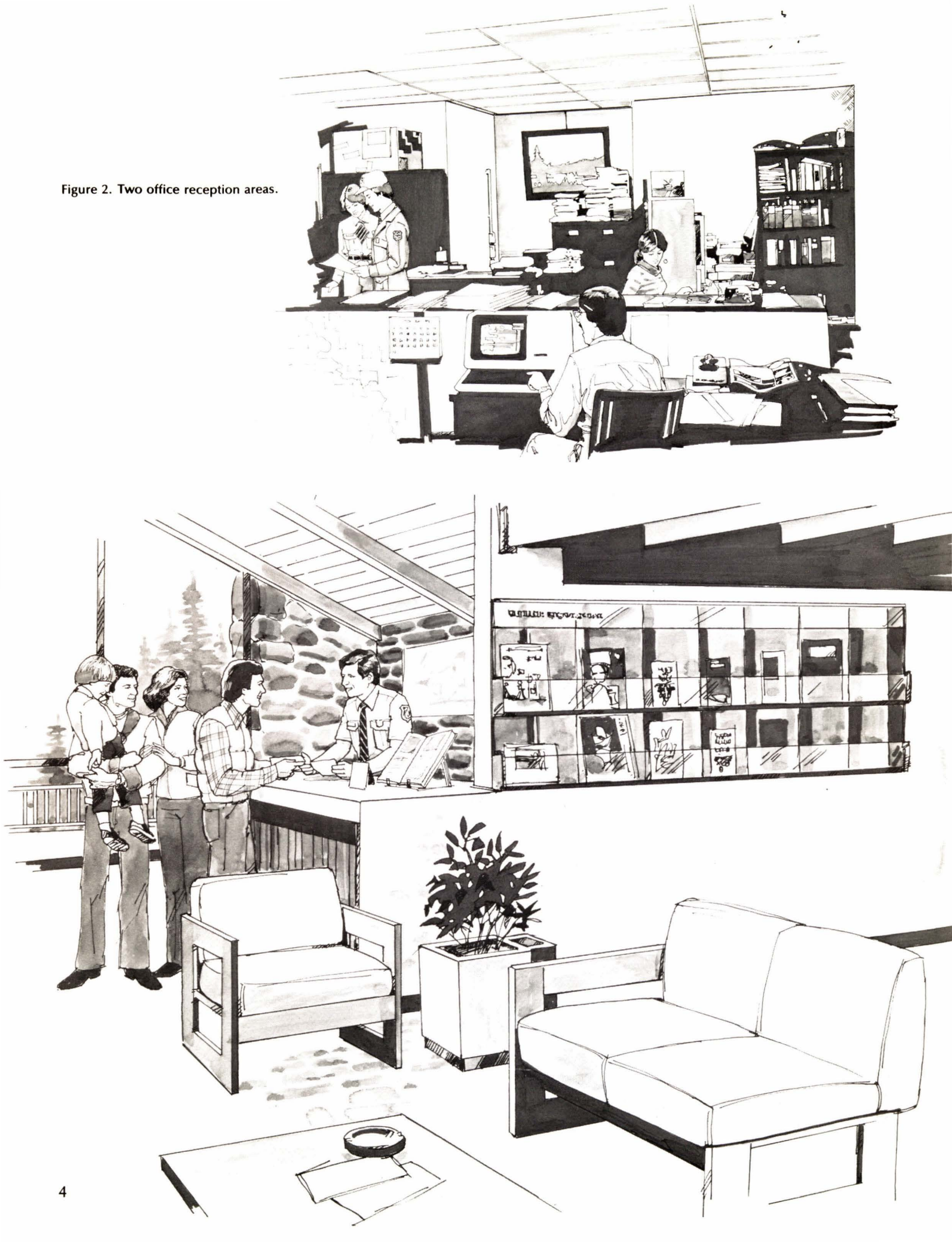
Forest Service Offices are a means of communicating our public service attitude. Many of our offices are not designed to serve the walk-in public, difficult to locate, don't provide convenient parking facilities for visitors, or in general do not reflect the attitude of an agency that really cares much about the visitor. In some instances, the public happens onto the Forest Service office by accident. This is not really the fault of any one's deliberate lack of concern; most Forest Service offices were established traditionally as administrative centers, with a visitor walking into a room of general office activity. The increased public use of National Forests over the past decade dictates that the office must consider the needs of the visitor more than it used to. For instance, visitors searching for an office shouldn't have to undertake a true life adventure to find it. Figure 1, is an example of a typical poorly identified and located Forest Service office.

Would any visitor, about to enter a building like the one in Figure 1, feel that they could be helped in obtaining any type of information, directions, or other matter? It's doubtful. This situation communicates a lack of public service concern and an ignorance of the public's needs. It stands directly in the way of our goal to create a positive attitude of public service. Your office should communicate the same friendly, responsive attitude that your telephone style or your letters do. Your office communicates indirectly to the public, so it is in some ways more important than more tangible contact. The impression that the Forest Service leaves with the visitor will be reflected by what the office communicates and how the success of our public service mission is linked directly to the visitor's perception of the environment of Forest Service offices.

Figure 1. Poorly located and identified building

Rox
WE BUY
AND SELL
FURNITURE
Antiques
GIFTS

Figure 2. Two office reception areas.



Design and the Forest Service office

A Forest Service office should communicate to a visitor that the agency is prepared to make the visit a valuable and pleasant one. The Forest Service office should also reflect the image of a caring, professional organization that is dedicated to public service and environmentally responsive land management. This involves creating an environment that emotionally reinforces the message that you want to convey.

The best way that you can begin to create this environment in your office and its surroundings is to understand how a building and its surroundings communicate through their design. Buildings *do* communicate a feeling or a mood through the use of different building materials, shapes of rooms, lighting, and color. Designers of shopping centers know this. Large shopping centers are designed in a way that makes you, the visitor, feel positive above going to the mall. Care is taken to create a carefully planned design scheme using materials, color, and different kinds of spaces to achieve an effect on you, the shopper. All this is done to cause people to feel good about coming to the shopping center and spending money. Our goal is to create a positive feeling about visiting the National Forests and about the way we manage the National Forests for the public.

Basic to design is line, form, color, and texture. Acting together, they can create a definite mood that communicates a message to an individual. For example, a room that has 8-foot ceilings and two small windows will make you feel differently than a lobby with 20-foot ceilings and one glass wall. A corridor will communicate a different message than a circular room. Wooden paneling creates a different mood than does flowered wall paper. Figure 2, shows two office reception areas. In which one would you feel more comfortable?

Figure 3. Entrance

You don't have to become a designer to start thinking about how better design could improve your office and its surrounding; but it is important to know how location, colors, and the shapes of buildings can greatly contribute to an improved public service image. A pleasant work environment also improves the productivity of employees. This is important.

Good design doesn't stop at the building, but includes how people using it get to and from the building, where they park, how they see the building from different distances, and much more. An effective design scheme must take into account all these factors to create the message desired. Figure 3 and 4 show two entrances to buildings. To which would you be more likely attracted?

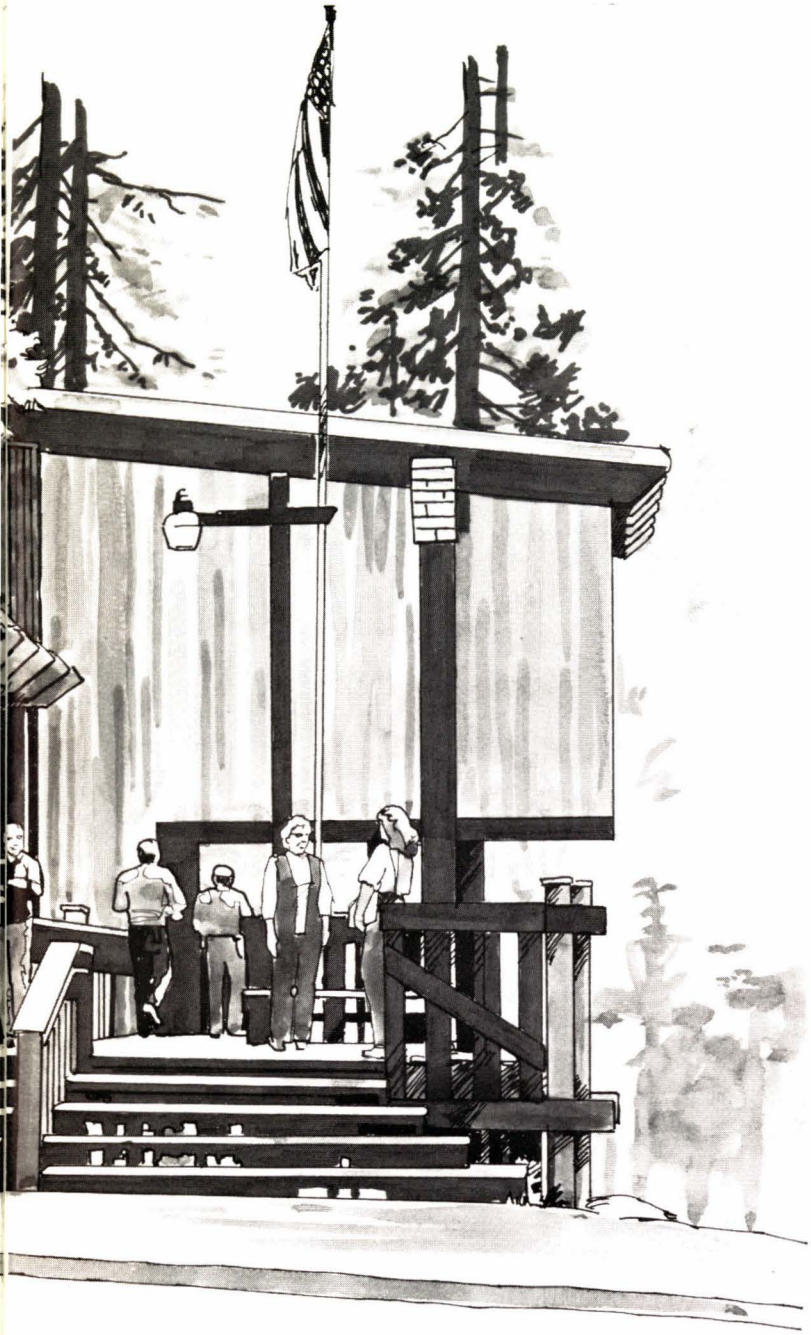
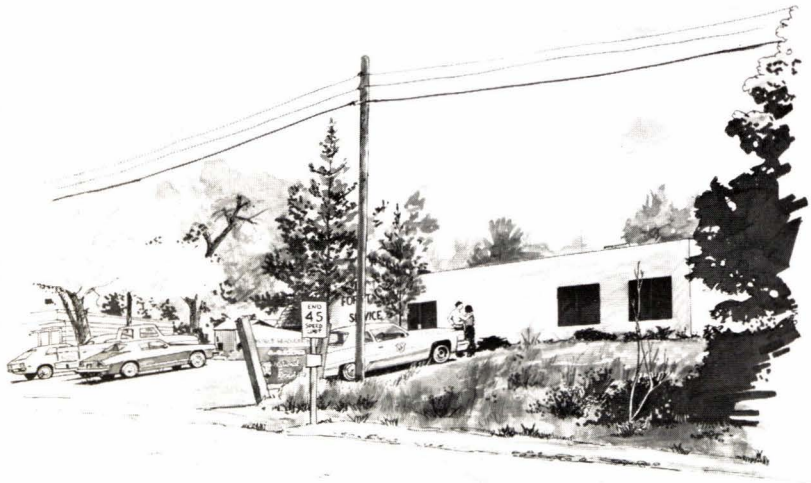


Figure 4. Entrance



Your office and its public service image

Thinking about how to improve your office's public service image means looking at what you've got to work with carefully. Pretend for a minute that *you* are a visitor to your own Forest Service office. Then ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I have much difficulty finding my office? Was it easy to identify?
- Could I tell the office was nearby through signs on the roads?
- Did I find a visitors slot in which to park my car, or did I just pull up to take a spot that might belong to the Ranger?
- Does the office look like it might be of some help in answering my question? Is it a pleasant place to spend some time?
- Does the office look like it might have some connection to the Forest Service?
- Would I be proud to work in that office?
- Is it obvious that the office is a good place to work?

Don't be ashamed to admit "no" or "not really" to several of these questions. The answers will help you see how a visitor might see your office. Naturally, not all of these questions will apply in every situation, but they begin to show where you can improve your HOST image. How can you do this?

Simple ideas help—signs on the main road and any entry artery, well-marked signs on your building itself, or a specific visitor parking area. But this is just the beginning. To get a clear picture of what can be done to improve your office's public service capability let's turn to the basic office design scheme.

Think design—The design scheme

To help improve the Forest visitor's experience with us, the Forest Service has studied the way visitors would use a Forest Service office. From the moment visitors enter your site to the time they leave, take their needs into consideration. Use of the basic design scheme (figure 5 & 6) will aid this effort. The scheme is a framework that identifies "functional areas" of your office and its surroundings. Each area, or element, of the scheme has a number of design suggestions and modifications that you can consider applying. Because the Forest Service has both forest and urban offices, two different design schemes are shown. One will probably apply to your office. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the basic design schemes.

Of course, it is impossible to apply all the characteristics of this scheme to every situation; the design is only a basic framework to help you see how to meet a Forest Service visitor's needs. Each office will have its own unique problems and solutions. The scheme is a handy compass when looking at your own office's problems. However, if the situation allows for an ideal design solution, the design scheme is an excellent roadmap.

Each element of the scheme is linked to the other so that they form a natural progression of experiences to reinforce the impression that the Forest Service has thought carefully about serving the visitor and is prepared to make his or her visit a positive one. The criteria within each area suggests ways that design can convey this feeling of welcome and courtesy. Let's look at the scheme in detail.

Figure 5. Design scheme (forest setting)

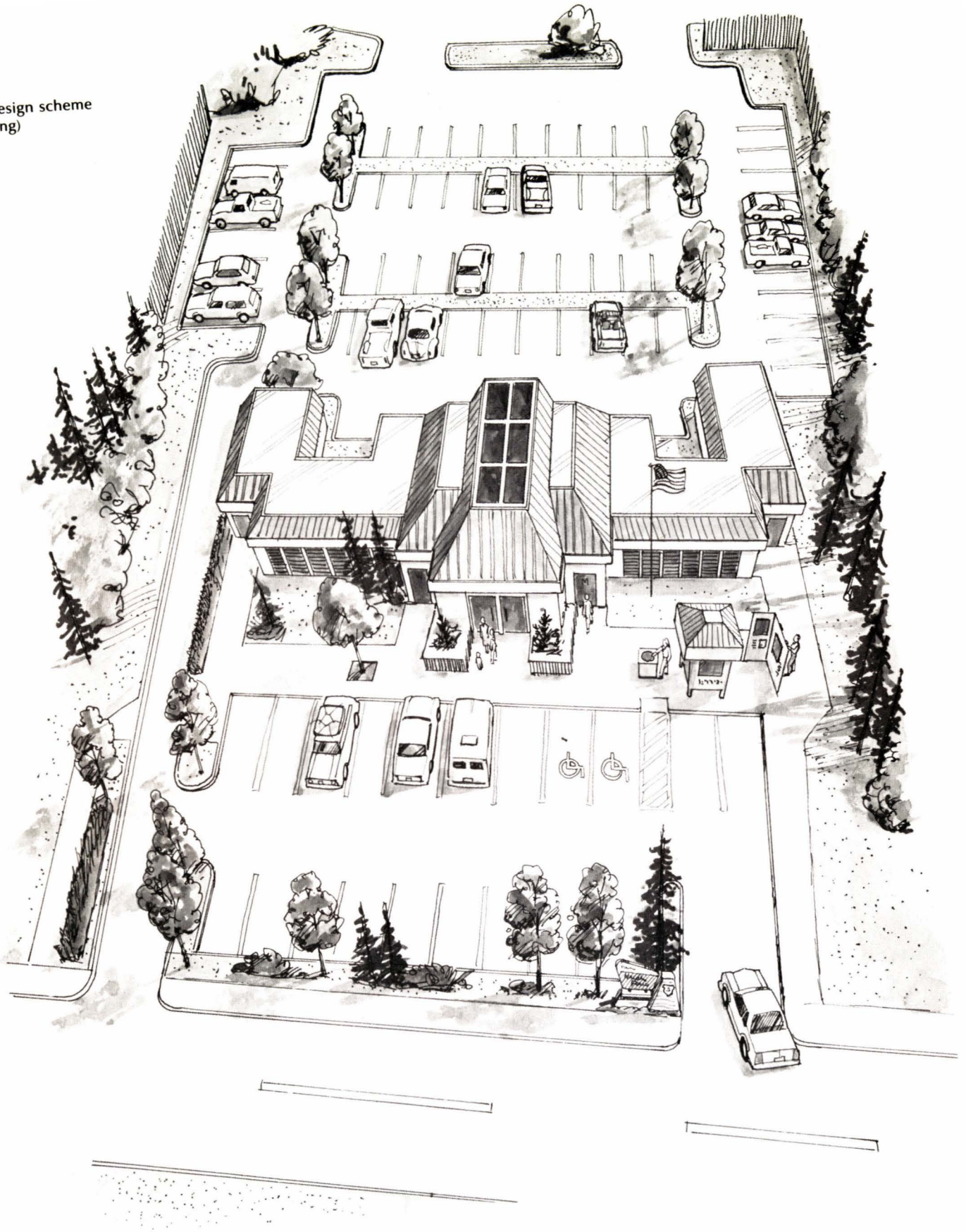


Figure 6. Design scheme (urban setting)

The basic elements

The design scheme is comprised of nine basic elements. These are:

- Location
- Pre-Approach signing
- Approach
- Entry
- Vehicle circulation and parking
- Pedestrian circulation
- Exterior reception
- Exterior architecture and design
- Interior architecture and design
- Graphic design and displays
- Other public needs & amenities

Location

Even if the Forest Service office is well-designed, it may provide limited public service if not situated in a place where visitors can use it readily.

As emphasized by realtors, location is perhaps the most vital requirement of an office. Location is the combination of proximity of an office to clientele, neighborhood environment, and expectations of the type of activities associated with business. Proper location will provide or negate many options for acceptable public contact, neighborhood, environment, or style and quality of structure. Even though location may be better controlled if the site is owned by the government, in many situations leasing will be the only alternative.

The location of an office is critical to successful service to the public. As a minimum the office should be easy to get to and possible to reach through effective signing. The best office location should provide the best solution for the coordinated needs of your clientel, employees, supporting services, transportation, community services, and work areas. When thinking about office location, consider the following:

- The mission of the office within the organization. Public contact should be provided in all offices, but may be emphasized more in some.
- The neighborhood setting and surrounding environment is important. The office should be located where the public would normally expect to find it. For example: while an office above a bowling alley may meet "shelter" requirements, it might not be condusive to contact by the public or conduct of governmental land management activites.

Choosing an effective office location can greatly reinforce the total image that you wish to convey to the public.

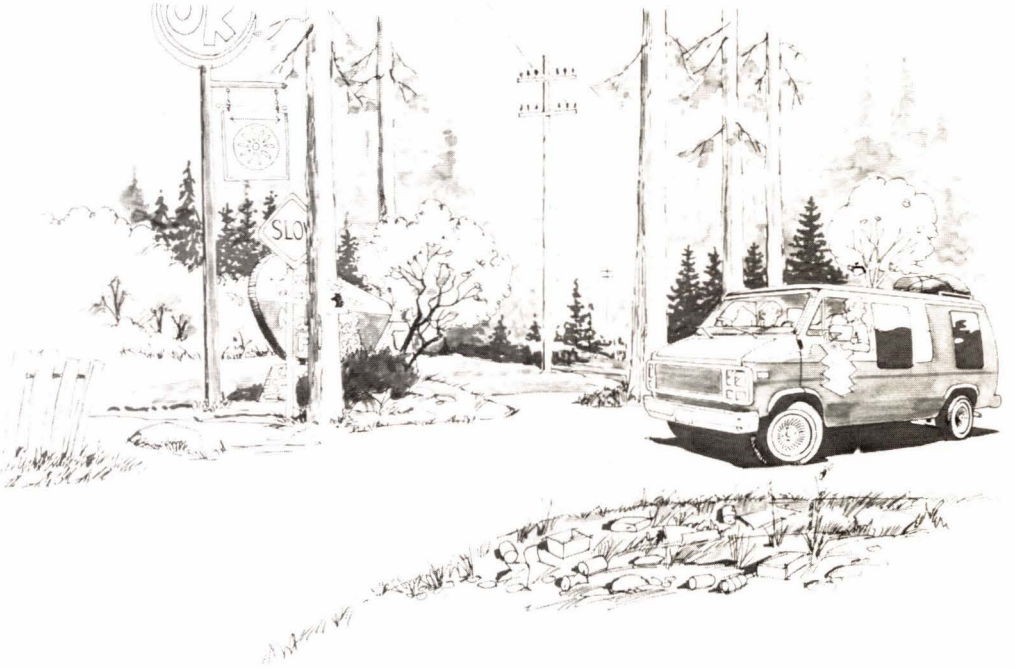
Figure 7. A Forest Service office from the road

Approach—Does anyone know you're there?

Before you or a member of your staff talks to a visitor, an impression of what the agency is all about has been communicated to the visitors an unspoken message has been conveyed through the measures taken to ensure visitors find their way. What kind of impression was made? How can it be improved to make your office and its surroundings convey a feeling of service and professionalism? Some basic things you can do are:

- Ensure that signs on the road tell potential visitors that a Forest Service office is nearby to assist them. Signs should be brief, legible, clear, uncluttered, and in good condition. Signs should be both informational and directional. Your road signs should look like the one outlined in figure 7.

Figure 7a. Poor identification signing along main road



- Where possible, locate planting to frame the view of your office and its site to help concentrate attention on your office. Figure 7 illustrates the view of a Forest Service office from a main road.
- Ensure that there are good directional signs to help the visitor find the approach road to your office. Signing along the main road should not be as in figure 7a.

Remember, before you can satisfy visitors with your professionalism they have to know *you are there*. Think carefully about signs and how visitors will first see your office. Their first impressions will often set the tone for their Forest Service transaction.

Entry—Setting the stage

Once off the road,the visitor's entry should be carefully designed and constructed (Figure 8). Entry to the office site should be attractive, simple, and, above all, safe. Concentrate on the following elements:

- Make sure that adequate traffic controls exist at your entry road turnoff (turn lane, light, etc.).
- Place good directional signs with Forest Service identification on the entry road to help visitors find you easily. Good design with controlled circulation can even reduce the necessity of some signs.
- Make sure that the entry road is in good condition, has adequate drainage, and is designed to handle all expected kinds and amount of vehicles.

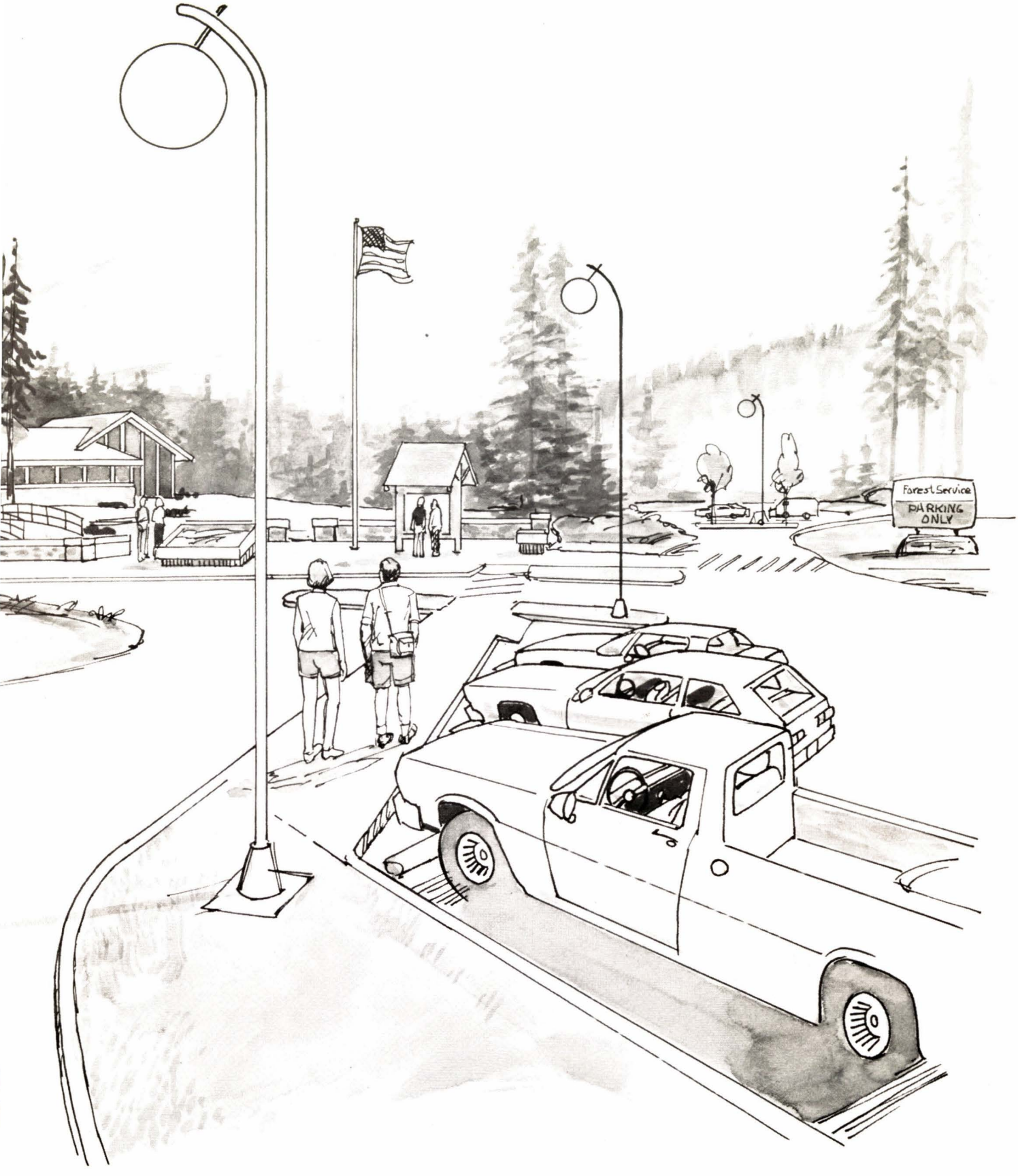
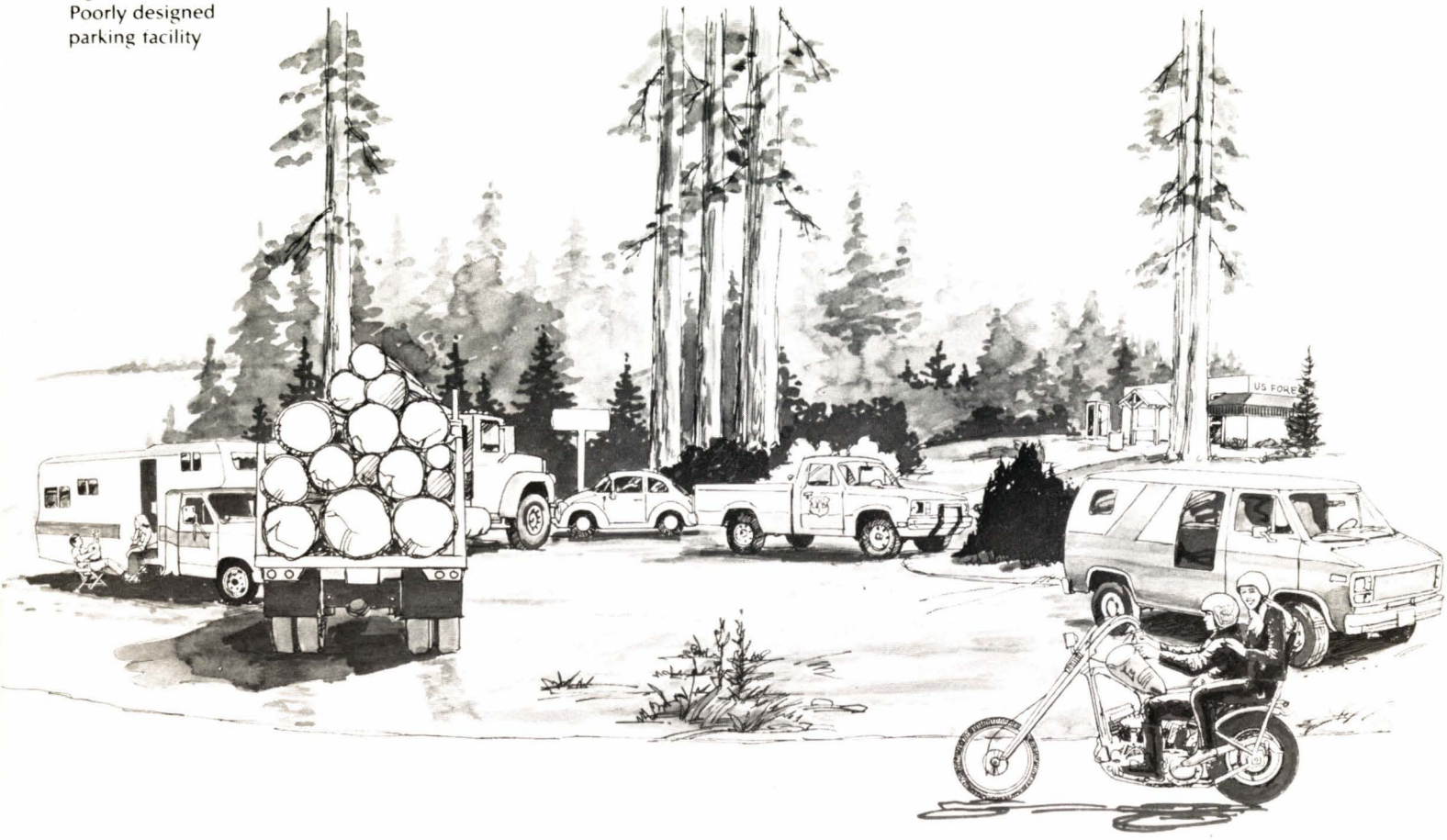


Figure 8. Entry road to a Forest Service office

Figure 8a.
Poorly designed
parking facility



- If required, be sure that the entry road is lighted sufficiently.
- If possible, give a feeling of arriving at the featured building first, parking second.
- If it is possible at your office site, try to separate visitor's vehicles from Agency vehicles. You can do this by the use of a well-marked directional sign on the entry road, and subdued entry to buildings in the complex that the public does not need access to.
- Direct visitors with different interest to separate locations. Too many different types of activities occuring on or near the parking area can cause congestion and confusion, as shown in Figure 8a.

These criteria are to make the visitor feel that the Forest Service is thinking a great deal about how their visit can be a productive and pleasant one. Each element, from good road conditions to useful signs, reinforces this effort. Don't ignore them when looking at your office.

Circulation and parking

Parking facilities for visitors will vary from office to office and will greatly depend on what can be done at each site. Use the following suggestions as areas that might be applicable in your case. Remember, the design scheme is only a framework. Make it work for your situation.

- Parking facilities should be as conveniently close to your office as possible. Separate visitor from staff vehicles. Provide adequate lighting.
- Try to provide special parking areas for handicapped people, motorcycles, trailers, vans, and other oversize vehicles. Allow for inexperienced drivers vacating pulling oversized loads. Provide one-way flow wherever possible.
- Ensure that signs direct visitors easily to the parking areas.
- Provide short-term parking for deliveries, trash removal, etc.
- Design parking spaces so that vehicular traffic flows smoothly and does not crowd visitor access. Make sure that the number of spaces can handle the normal demand.
- If required, consider vehicle security.

Providing safe, convenient parking for visitors is one of the best ways of demonstrating your desire to serve their needs and be a good HOST. Are there vehicles parked outside your door? Can you improve the situation?

Pedestrian circulation—From the car to your door

Once out of the vehicle, visitors should be made to feel welcome about their impending visit to you. The circulation area, or walkway, from the parking lot to your office should be convenient, safe, and attractive. It should reinforce what has come before and help anticipate what will follow. It is a very important but subtle area to help your HOST image. Think about the following:

- Make sure that visitors can get from the parking area to the walkway easily and safely.
- Provide curb cuts or ramps for handicapped visitors. When necessary provide handrails.
- Use the quickest, shortest path possible from parking lot to front door to prevent visitors from making their own path.
- Maintain the walkway in good condition in all weather situations.
- Provide waste receptacles along the path.
- If required, place clear identification signs on the walkway to direct visitors to your office.
- Use plantings adjacent to or near walkways to help reinforce the forest experience. If possible, place benches along walkways for handicapped and aged visitors.
- Screen out utility areas.
- Provide attractive lighting.

Figure 9.
Poor pedestrian walkway

Remember, each of these elements is helping to build an image for the visitor. The pedestrian walkway helps to reinforce the visitor's feeling that you care about their visit. You are trying to communicate a positive, appealing image. Everything counts. Figure 9 & 10 illustrate walkways to your office—which serves the public better? Which move depicts your situation?

Exterior reception—the office entry way

The area directly at your front door is a key to conveying a positive image of the Forest Service. Visitors approaching your office will see this area first; it should both reinforce the atmosphere of friendliness and public service and set the visitor's expectations for the office itself. Improve your exterior reception area in the following ways:

- Landscaping and structural appointments should make the entry way obvious to first time visitors.
- Provide seating facilities for those visitors not entering the office.
- Ensure that there is adequate lighting.
- Ensure weather protection through the use of covered porches, canopies, awnings, or screens, etc.
- Provide directions to public telephones, toilets, and drinking fountain, etc.

Figure 10. A Forest Service office pedestrian walkway

An important function of your exterior reception area is to provide a means of conveying National Forest information to visitors when your office is closed. One way to do this is with a simple bulletin board in the exterior reception area. Such a board can display brochures, information on forest conditions and weather information. Other useful items to put on such a board may include:

- Map with proper visitor orientation
- Location of recreation areas
- Facilities available
- Emergency telephone numbers
- Permit requirements
- Address or phone number of nearby Forest Service office.

A well thought-out and designed display board can help you be a good HOST even after office hours. Figure 11 shows an appealing exterior reception area with a protected display board.

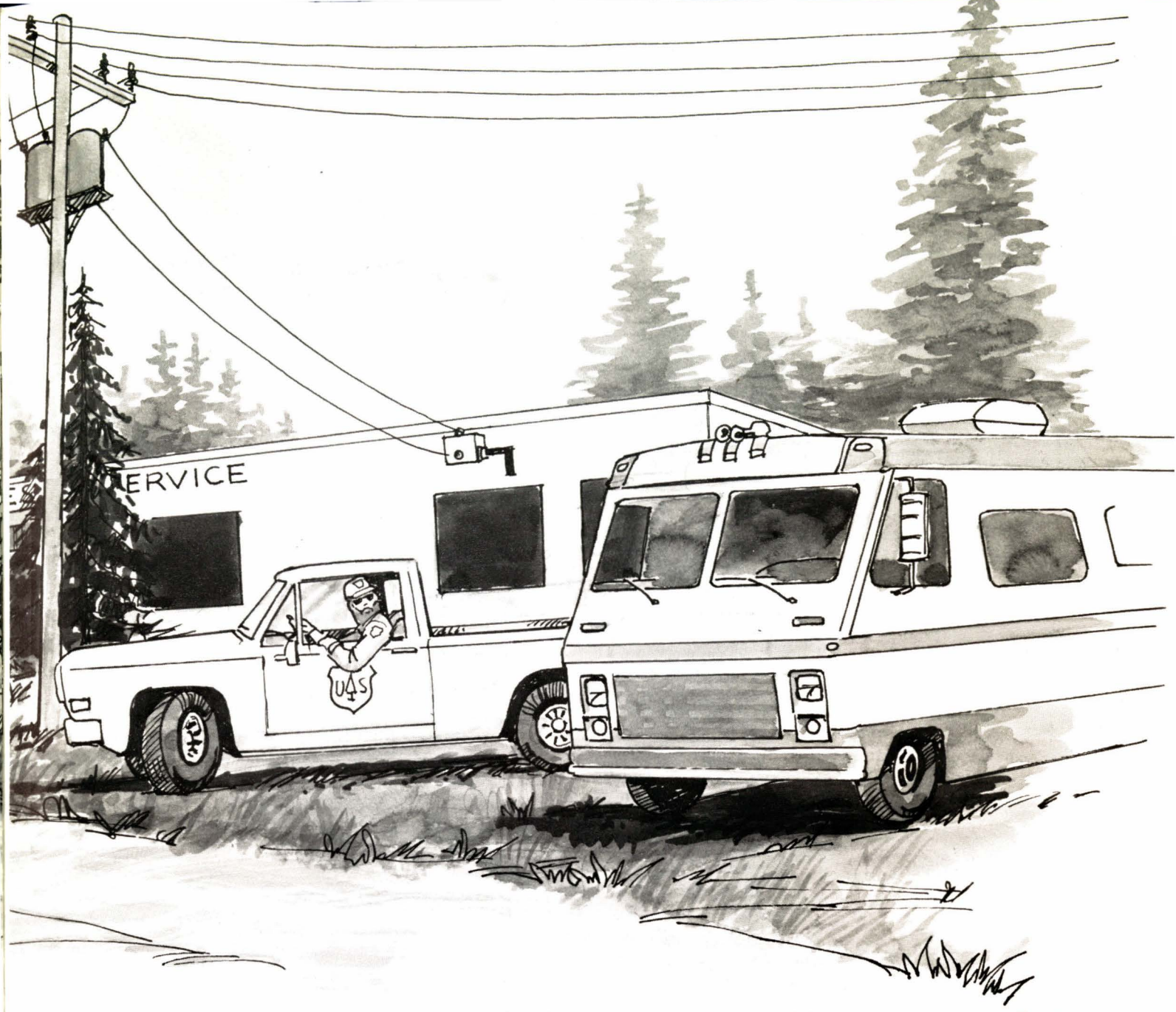
Figure 11. Outside information area.

Figure 12. Forest Service office structure

Office architecture—What does your office communicate?

Many Forest Service offices are leased. While there are limitations, a lot can be done with these facilities as well. Working within the limits, begin to think of how your building can be improved. If you are involved in planning to improve an existing office, a new lease, or proposed design, consider the following:

- Office structures should be compatible with their settings, both in architectural style and harmony of material and color. For example, a Quonset hut in the middle of a forest glade or an office in a neighborhood shopping center does not blend with its surroundings. A residential looking structure does not represent what is expected of government offices.
- Forest Service offices should be designed to contribute to the feeling of the warmth and hospitality that we want to convey. Look again at the discussion of how buildings communicate feeling. The texture, shape, and colors of exterior and interior materials should contribute to a positive message of public service. Figure 12, is an example of a Forest Service office. What feelings does this illustration convey?



- Ensure that the materials and finishes of the structure are cost-effective and contribute to creating a positive atmosphere. Exterior finishes and graphics may provide a rich and warm feeling without being expensive to do.
- Diverse weather conditions (rain, ice, glare) should be considered in structure design. Shadow patterns, glare, rain, ice, and snow may darken the building, increase maintenance of walkways, and generally reduce the appearance desired.

Many of the criteria discussed here will impact new office design, but as mentioned, offices can be improved appreciably. Start looking, at how your structure itself can be practically improved. Figure 12a, illustrates a new Forest Service office that is carefully designed to meet the criteria discussed in this section.

So far, we've been setting the stage for the visitor. Now we will discuss the subject of the interior office. This is an important area, one which you should give careful thought.

Interior office—What are you telling the visitor?

Remember, the image of the Forest Service is often reflected in the first impression. Once inside your office, the visitors should be aware that they are not just in an office. Expanding your office from just a work place to a public service center will require you to think about many design aspects.

In addition to addressing space requirements for employees, storage, conference facilities, and word processing equipment you need to consider ways to create a positive public service atmosphere for visitors. In some cases this will be a challenge, but is central to the success of our public service mission. Business contacts need to be given the same consideration as casual visitors. People often penetrate the inner office. Therefore office design should enhance the

Figure 12a. New Forest Service office

Figure 13. Reception and information area.

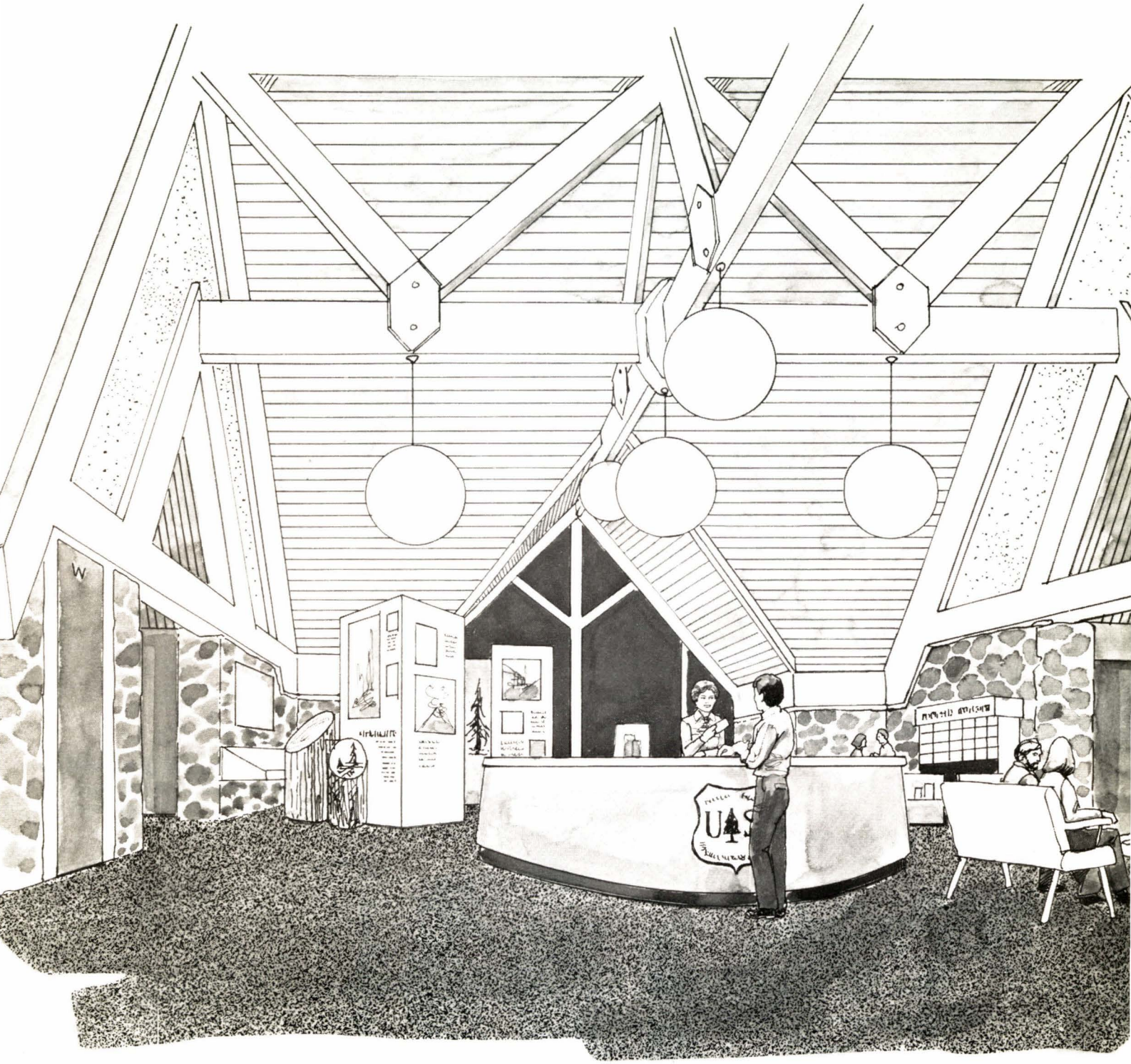
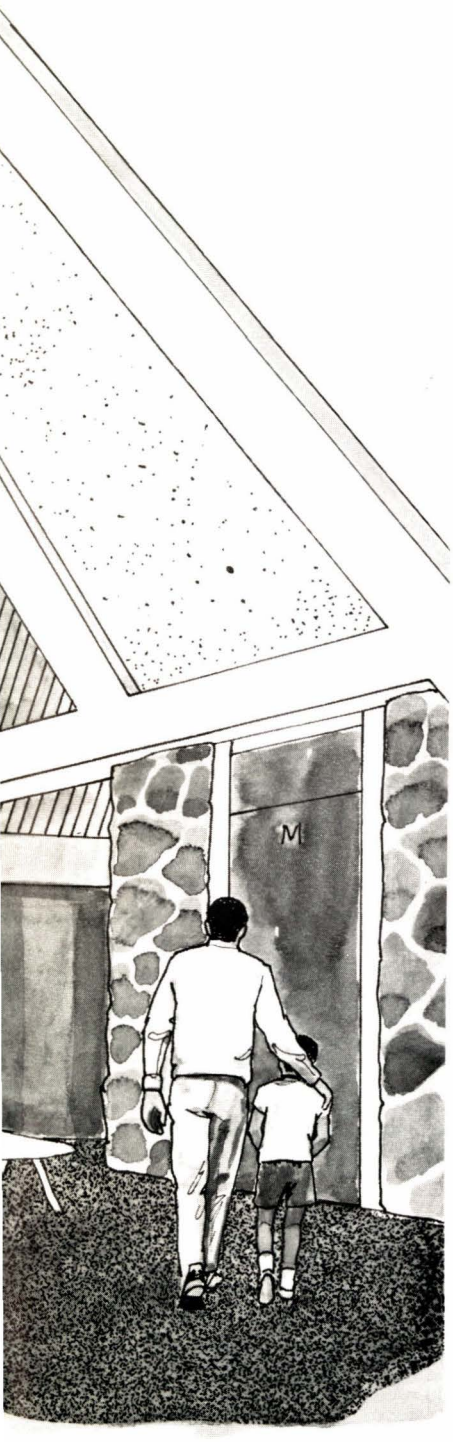


Figure 14. An information counter or desk at a visitor center or heavily visited office.



environment through minimizing office distractions or clutter. Well-designed office interiors will help to make a more productive place to work as well as reinforce the opportunities to serve the public better. Consider the following:

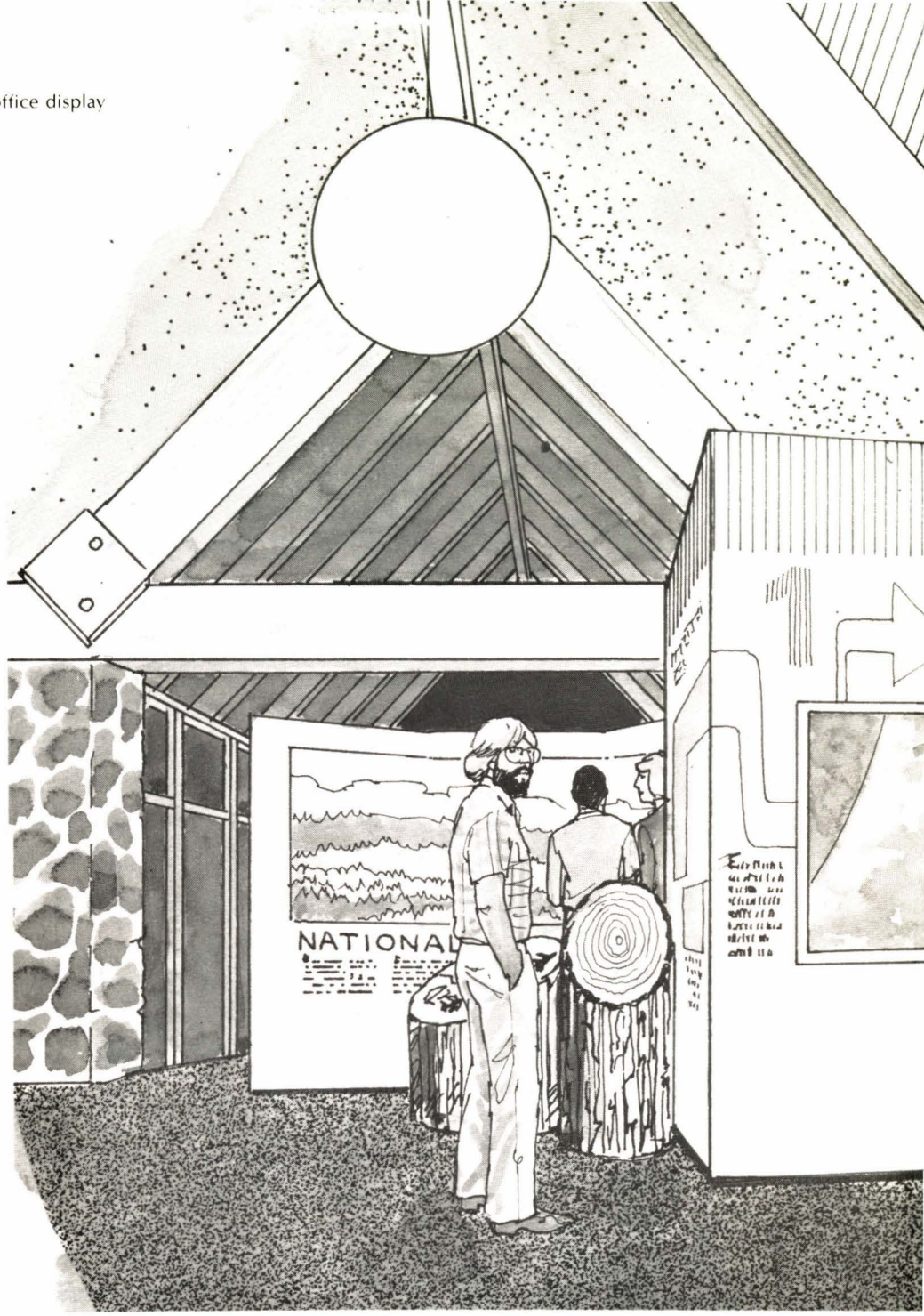
- Try to create a reception area for visitors that is separate from the main office area. Don't "quarantine" your staff, but create a definite area to receive and care for visitors.
- Ensure that your office is adequately and effectively lighted for both staff and public service use.
- If possible, consider minimizing office noise through acoustical treatment (carpet, ceilings).
- Create an appealing and receptive office interior through the use of inviting colors, finishes, and textures. This might mean a new paint job in two colors or, if permitted, paneling a wall or two of your office.
- Consider the impression that appropriate furniture, interior appointments, and work space give.
- Include places to sit, restroom facilities, drinking fountain.
- Appropriate use of plant materials helps create a natural feeling.
- Consider your office furniture and other interior items.

One way to orient visitors to your program is to provide a public information center or reference desk so that visitors will know where to inquire if they need assistance or further information. When thinking about setting-up a reference desk or information center, consider the following:

- Does your office receive enough visitors to warrant a counter and large display for the public? Or only occasional visitors, where a small rack of brochures is adequate and staff hired for other purposes can handle a question now and then.
- If a counter is used be careful to ensure that it is long enough so that visitors don't line up behind it. Avoid high counters and design them so that they are functional and less threatening to a visitor.
- Place brochures near the information center, away from employee work areas so that visitors can browse through them without feeling as though they are interrupting office activities.
- Provide a map for reference purposes (under plastic or glass) on the counter top or reference desk.
- Keep the area free of office clutter.

Figure 13, illustrates a good solution for existing offices. A well planned designed contact point for heavily visited offices or visitor centers could look like the one in Figure 14. How about yours?

Figure 15.
Interior office display



Graphics and displays—What does the visitor learn from you?

A very important element of an effective office scheme is the design of graphic displays and publications facilities. This is where you can really help the Forest Service public service image. A well designed series of informational plates, photos, and an attractive, well-stocked brochure display is the best way you can tell a visitor that the Forest Service is there to help you enjoy the forest more. Creating an effective graphics display scheme is a great way to reinforce the media element of the HOST Program. Done creatively, it's the Agency's best advertisement. Think about the following:

- Provide an attractive and accessible brochure rack for use in the public information area of your office.

- Provide decorative wall prints or photos on aspects of your unit's work activities, recreation opportunities, and land features.
- Create interpretive and informational displays on interesting aspects of Forest Service activity. These displays should be professional in design, adequately and creatively lit, compatible with the office's overall design scheme, and directed at a general audience. Effective displays should be considered in the following media:

  —Audiovisual (slide)
  —Photos, photo essays
  —Art
  —Graphics

Creative thinking about displays and informational exhibits is essential. Share your Forest Service experience with the public in these ways. For example, design an exhibit to illustrate how wildlife uses forests or how cultural treatments might enhance wildlife habitat. One way to do this is with a series of photos showing an area where logging took place throughout several vegetative changes. Keep the information seasonaly current. This is a good way to demonstrate what actually goes on in the forest, and can help a visitor understand what the Forest Service is all about. Figure 15, shows an example of a well planned and designed office interpretive display board.

Figure 15a, also shows a well designed interpretive display, but for this office is different in that limited space was available. Receiving visitors is probably not the main purpose of this office but their needs have still been recognized.

Other amenities— The finishing touches

In addition to the elements discussed, provide for general public service amenities like restrooms, public ashtrays, telephones, and drinking fountains. Be sure trash cans are visible and located both in the parking area and the reception area. Identify restrooms and keep them clean and well maintained. These can make your office a more visitor-oriented space.

Improving your office

Creating a positive public service and professional image means thinking about the areas of the design scheme and how they reinforce each other and interact. After you've taken a good, hard look at your own office and its surroundings, you should be ready to start planning your improvement scheme. The actual design scheme will of course depend on the scope of your concepts and budget limitations. While there is a little "designer" in most of us, actual planning of improvements should utilize the services of the design professionals available within the agency such as architects, landscape architects, graphic specialists, and interpreters. The following paragraphs outline briefly an effective step-by-step procedure for study, evaluation, and implementation of your plan. The procedure is based on the FS Manual Section 7310.

The planning procedure consists of five distinct phases:

- Preliminary analysis/summary
- Needs assessment package
- Plan options/selection
- Approval
- Implementation

Preliminary analysis/summary

The is an analysis of alternatives to check the viability of different options for methods of acquisition, location, needs satisfaction, cost relationship for facility planning, and program response. Considerations for how well proposed alternatives meet HOST Program objectives are also included. Review and evaluate your office site for problem areas in each applicable design scheme element discussed previously. Think about cost-effective ways to improve these areas. Summarize these findings.

Needs assessment

Develop a comprehensive needs assessment package to address specific criteria for improving the program requirements of your office. This package should consider public service, program implementation, employment considerations, and realistic, cost-effective design improvements. Refer to the design scheme as you do this.

Figure 15a. Interior office display where space is restricted

Plan options selection

Determine a series of design options that may be applicable to your office needs. These options might include:

- Renovation of office interior
- Add on or expand structure
- No change to office
- Where required, new construction
- Lease arrangement

Select the most cost-effective option with respect to application of HOST Program goals. This strategy should be the most practical combination of space requirements, public service improvements, and workable design concepts. For example, if you want to install a public information center in your office, weigh this against creating a better entry road setting. Prioritize your immediate needs realistically, considering your budget at every step.

Approval

Submit project plan for approval as applicable. Once approval is granted, begin to implement the plan. Review is for the purpose of communicating ideas and suggesting improvement for a good design.

Implementation

Consider your budget picture when implementing the design modifications. Think about the following:

- Develop a strong team of professional personnel qualified in architectural and office design, landscape architecture, engineering, commercial graphics, human behavior engineering, etc. A strong team will help ensure success.
- Develop a design prospectus that accommodates all the design criteria discussed.
- Maintenance and operations costs may change dramatically after project completion.
- Monitor project development closely.
- Is a volunteer project feasible? This may have a significant impact on project budget.
- Involve your leasing officer very early in the planning process.

Advice on needs that may or may not be available or attainable through the lease process could influence the final requirements and the method (rehab., construction, lease, lease/construction, etc.) of meeting your needs.

Summary

All Forest Service Offices should be designed and managed to provide a public service. The image the public receives is conveyed by our facilities before a visitor even contacts a Forest Officer. A good initial impression transmitted from well planned and designed offices will often set the tone of our dealings with Forest visitors.

Remember, important messages are indirectly communicated to the public by the location, signing, parking, pedestrian circulation, and interior and exterior architecture of Forest Service offices. Our office and reception facilities can greatly affect the overall image that people have of the Forest Service. The Forest Service should be portrayed as a professional but caring public service agency that is dedicated to the responsible management of our nation's natural resources.